

Football

Wycombe bring new Continental angle to an old English slope

By Gerry Harrison

An evening of drama, romance and a slice or two of make-believe played out on stages dotted round England and Scotland has produced some startling football situations. There are no first division sides in the League Cup semi-final round. Three second division clubs and one hero from the fourth division now fight for fame and fortune at Wembley.

Another League club succumbed to a non-League side in the FA Cup. The immediate reaction of the victor was that he had "no chance" in the next round. And a 27-year-old excelled himself in England's under-23 side. Who needs fiction with football around?

Chester's feat of eliminating first division Newcastle in their quarter-final round replay was, according to their manager, Ken Roberts: "A triumph of character". Certainly for most of the game they played second fiddle to Newcastle, whose football was full of determination and first principles, like tight marking, hard tackling, and last to the ball's a fairy. But, without the injured Tudor, their finishing was not good.

As Chester battled away in front of a capacity 19,000 crowd at Sealand Road, rarely showing the quality football which disposed of Leeds, the biting affair levelled out into what looked like stalemate. John James, however, Chester's leading scorer, changed all that with the only goal of the game in the seventy-fifth minute.

James, or "Jessie" as they inevitably call him, was a £4,000 investment from Port Vale, a fee which has already been recouped in this amazing Cup run of theirs. They now meet Aston Villa in

their semi-final round match. A grim Joe Harvey, Newcastle's manager, said of Chester afterwards: "I didn't rate them at all, except their goalkeeper. Chester were a kick and rush side." A degree of accuracy getting the better of a touch of graciousness. Brian Green, Chester's coach and the driving force behind their purple patch, countered with: "I could say what does that make Newcastle? But I thought they did everything right and worked very hard. The only difference was we scored and they didn't."

Meanwhile, 35 miles up the Chester road Manchester United were beating Middlesbrough 3-0 at Old Trafford. For most of the game, despite the assistance of most of the 49,527 crowd, United struggled to exploit a home advantage. Then two defensive mistakes opened the gates and from then on they looked confident and convincing. Norwich City are their opponents in the semi-final round, and their manager, John Bond, who watched the replay, said yesterday: "I feel we have a much better chance of getting to Wembley against Manchester United than against Middlesbrough. We have beaten United once this season, and I have the sort of players who will respond to the atmosphere of Old Trafford. I am confident."

Brian Lee, the director of the Bisham Abbey Sports Centre, and the manager of Wycombe Wanderers, is also confident—confident that his Isthmian League side have "no chance" against Middlesbrough in the third round of the FA Cup in January. In their replay with Bournemouth, Wycombe exploited the fact that

Bournemouth were without their injured goalkeeper, Charlton, throughout the second half when they had a forward, Wingate, in goal. Goals from an estate agent and a schoolteacher put them through into the third round for the first time.

Now they have the advantage of their sloping pitch against Middlesbrough, but there were no brash boasts from Mr Lee. "Middlesbrough are a much better side than us, with an excellent away record. We've no chance." Or is this the new subtle approach, used by Continental managers in the good old days when England were top dogs, an approach which will rock Middlesbrough and football.

Finally, an unlikely story if ever there was one, Phil Boyer, the 27-year-old Norwich forward, had an outstanding game in the England-Scotland under-23 international in Aberdeen. Boyer, a late replacement after Don Revie had lost eight of his original selections, had a decisive hand in the first two goals, both scored by Tueart, of Manchester City. Whitworth, of Leicester City, scored the third. Boyer's background is comparatively undistinguished—a free transfer from Derby County, York City, Bournemouth, and Norwich City, where he was bought to link up again with Ted MacDougall.

The fee of £145,000 seemed an extravagance to some at the time. But in the light of Don Revie's comments about him after the game, there could be some rapid reassessments soon. "Boyer gave an exceptional and very exciting display", Mr Revie said. "It could be an important one."